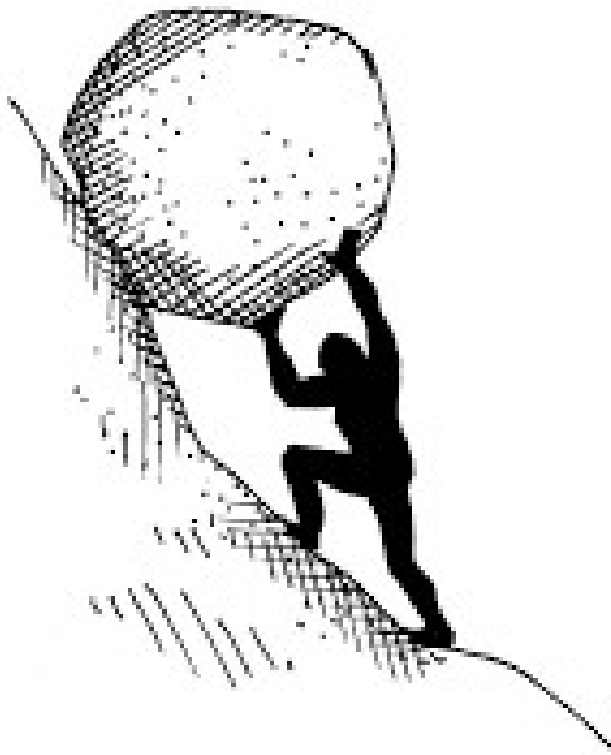


THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS

Albert Camus

Review by Shobhit Singh
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“There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.”

Albert Camus comes from the school of existentialist philosophy, a line of thought which believes that existence precedes the meaning of it. This piece of workplace during the existentialist cultural movement that flourished in Europe in the 1940s and 1950s.

"The Myth of Sisyphus" revolves around Camus trying to find the answer to what he believes is the most serious philosophical problem in the world and that is the notion of suicide. Is life truly worth living or should you voluntarily end it?

In the first half of the essay, he builds up this notion of absurd and why people commit suicide. He says that with people nowadays it's so easy to fall in the same monotonous rhythm. It can be soul-crushing and devoid of anything that feels even remotely satisfactory and one day you start to wonder if all this stuff, waking up, going to work matters. And that's when you go in a deep existential crisis. And when that happens, we find ourselves in this situation where we long for happiness and have a need for clarity and beg the universe for a meaning or a reason. Sooner and later realizing that there might be none. And as we stand face to face with the meaningless and irrational universe, unable to find an explanation of existence, we give in and succumb to sorrow. Camus says, "a divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints." allows absurdity to manifest. What he means by absurd can be rather confusing at times but what my final takeaway is that absurd is the human desire to be understood, to find meaning and the universe not having any. He explains that it is not the human existence that is absurd or the universe that is absurd but the interaction between the two that constitutes the absurd.

In the second half, he presents us with the options on how to deal with the absurd. He says that living in this absurd world is rather discomfiting and for a lot of people there are two ways out of this situation; either jumping off a building and committing suicide which according to Camus is just avoiding the problem and not confronting it, or finding refuge in religion or some preordained theory to make sense of everything and not get lost in this seemingly absurd world. Camus termed this approach of dealing with absurdity as 'Philosophical suicide' a.k.a living in denial a.k.a escaping the absurd. Camus, for this reason, didn't want to be known as an existentialist because even though famous existentialists like Kierkegaard, Chestov, and Jean-Paul-Sartre acknowledge the absurd, they want to escape from it and in the process, they commit philosophical suicide. This puts Camus in a new "genre" of philosophers called Absurdists.

According to him, both physical and philosophical suicide are ways of running from the problem. His suggestion to the problem is short and concise but unsettling. He asks us to simply embrace the absurd. To accept that all of this work, suffering, pain has no meaning, me writing this review, you grading this has no meaning and to live in a world devoid of any meaning or purpose. Absurd can hit you at any point in life and choosing to refute suicide and denial and revolting against it is the only way to go. Revolting in form of enjoying your favorite food or have a fun time with your family. To Camus, someone who faces the irrationality of existence and doesn't hide from it is an "Absurd Hero".

He closes the essay with a story about the Greek mythological story about King Sisyphus, the strongest mortal on Earth. So strong that he even defeated death. To teach him a lesson the other gods condemned him to an eternity of pushing a boulder up a hill just to watch it roll down

and then pushing it up again and it rolls down again. Sisyphus who now is immortal and can't find refuge in either suicide or denial. So all he can do is push the boulder up the hill and watch it roll down for eternity, overcoming the absurd by revolting infinitely in his tragic existence. There is no hope for success. All you can do is find happiness in that eternal toil. Sisyphus is the ideal absurd man. He writes that 'all Sisyphus' silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing. Likewise, the absurd man, when he contemplates his torment, silences all the idols.' We become most human – most free- when we acknowledge this. In the end Camus closes with one of the most quoted lines in philosophy. He says that when you imagine Sisyphus pushing that heavy boulder up the hill, we must always imagine him happy as he is confronting the punishment and persisting against it.

This revolutionary work by Camus led to the creation of absurdism as a branch of existentialism. To a general audience like me who hasn't read much philosophy literature before, it can be a hard piece to read especially because of Camus' numerous references to Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Dostoevsky and his circular attempts at defining what the absurd means to him. But it's important not to get stuck on the minor details and to see the bigger picture that Camus is trying to paint. It is also not a rationally detached project but is rooted in reality and engaged in the way we live our lives. This book has been successful in voicing out the concerns and questions born out of the existentialist era and providing a rather unsatisfactory answer, but a definite answer to the problem. This work by Camus is a timeless masterpiece. It is as relevant today as it was 70 years ago when it was written because this pathetic struggle for meaning will go on as long as humans roam the Earth. I would recommend it to anyone going through their own existential crises or just looking for an interesting read.

“It was previously a question of finding out whether or not life had to have a meaning to be lived. It now becomes clear on the contrary that it will be lived all the better if it has no meaning”